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Richson, Charles

Manchester Statistical
Society

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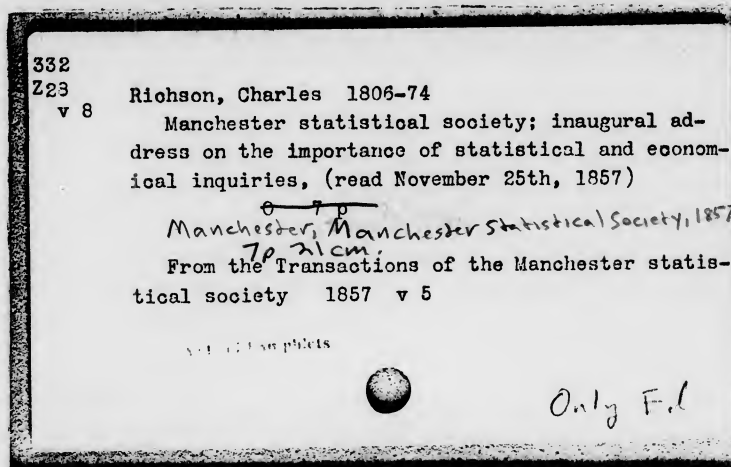
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332
228
1
No 1

MANCHESTER STATISTICAL SOCIETY.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

On the Importance of Statistical and Economical Inquiries.

By THE REV. CHARLES RICHSON, M.A.

CANON OF MANCHESTER, PRESIDENT.

[Read November 25th, 1857.]

THE common observation, "Save me from facts and figures," may be taken as evidence of the necessity of supporting such a Society as the present; because it indicates an ignorance, or want of appreciation, of the connection which exists between Statistical Inquiries and much economical and social advantage.

Primarily, no doubt, Statistics have to do with numbers; but numbers, correctly ascertained, and tabulated or arranged in proper order, can be regarded only as the basis of the science properly called statistical; whereas the instruction to be derived from numbers, under such circumstances, gives them an importance which can scarcely be over-rated.

It is gratifying to observe however, that, even in its most elementary features, Statistical science is becoming more and more appreciated by public departments; and we may hopefully expect therefore that the public mind will, in the course of time, be effectually indoctrinated with like sentiments, and turn the knowledge so acquired to practical account. Were there, however, in Statistical Inquiries no other aim than that of collecting and arranging numbers, the formation of a Society for that purpose would be scarcely necessary, unless to supply the requisite funds and organize an efficient staff for the work to

be performed; because all such investigations, to be correctly made, as also the tabulating of results, require an agency which voluntary zeal can seldom supply, and must depend rather upon remunerated, than voluntary exertion. Indeed, the utility of such investigations on the part of a voluntary association, except upon a limited scale, under extraordinary circumstances, to verify or correct received statements, is constantly becoming less; because the resources of Government are allowed to be more available than formerly for inquiries of that character. The returns thus obtained are of great value; and I consider this Society would materially promote its objects if it procured copies of those returns for a Reference Library; and especially if, from time to time, it provided that such returns should be examined and collated by competent sub-committees, and a digest of the most important published under its sanction.

But if we admit that the mere collection of numbers, although useful in some respects, affords but little inducement for the permanent support of a Society like the present, there are deductions of the highest possible importance to be drawn from numbers carefully collected; and indeed there is no aspect in which we can consider society, or even the social relationships of individuals, wherein such deductions may not be of advantage, because they address themselves to the economical improvement both of public and private life; and hence the man of wisdom, whatever his position and station, must respect their admonition.

In a community, therefore, like our own, where the mind is of necessity much engaged with the *matériel* of commerce, how fortunate is it—as our Secretary, Mr. HERFORD, has so often and so well remarked—that we find an Association established and supported, having objects in view which combine the most utilitarian purposes of social economics with the most intellectual investigations of their soundest principles. Nor is it the least commendation of this Society, that subjects which, in their application, properly belong to professional study, may be examined, so far as their principles are concerned, and may be discussed on the simple basis of truth, by every

member of the Association, without regard to his professional avocation.* Here the technicalities of professional rule are unimportant. The statistical data being correct, the deductions, if logical, must be admitted as correct also; and if custom or practice be found inconsistent with truth, it becomes the duty and distinction of this Society to advocate an amendment.

Within the limits of a brief address, it would be futile to attempt to enumerate the various subjects to which the attention of this Society may be properly directed. From an early period of its existence, its investigations in respect to education have placed it, even in the estimation of the Legislature, in a very prominent position. Carefully avoiding, with great judgment, any expression of opinion in respect to the precise system which ought to be adopted for the general improvement, it has contented itself with endeavouring to ascertain the deficiencies which really exist, the moral evils connected with those deficiencies, and the duty of the Legislature and the public to provide for their removal.

The Statistics of crime and misfortune, of intemperance and vice, have here been the frequent occasion of serious consideration and discussion. Nor, indeed, can the Society render to the public a more essential service than by continuing to collect and classify such Statistics, and endeavouring to direct the attention of influential and reflecting persons to their painful but instructive lessons.

In connection with crime, the thought is necessarily directed to the varieties of punishment; and here, again, the Society has repeatedly shown that the Statistics of punishment, as compared with the Statistics of amendment in criminals, and the absence of repetitions of offences, are suggestive of much practical improvement. We may remark also, that as every question which concerns the general or social health is affected by the statistics of disease or death, the frequent attention of the Society has been properly engaged with such subjects.

The Statistics of social life, from the consumption of bread to the indulgence of the highest luxuries, or from the losses in

26 May 11 A. 34

strikes to the losses by extravagant speculation or legitimate trade, indicate the habits, the progress, the folly or discretion of the people, and deserve, from time to time, in such a Society as the present, very serious attention. In relation also to agriculture, the general employment of machinery, the interchanges of commerce, the system of banking, and the accumulation of taxes and the public debt, the collection of Statistics is of much practical utility, and may help forward the settlement of questions of the deepest public interest. And here we may further observe, that in the discussion of subjects *directly* connected with Statistical Inquiries, it is neither advisable nor practicable to exclude others which have only an *indirect* or *collateral* connection. Thus, in the consideration of the Statistical facts which relate to crime, punishment, and litigation, how is it possible to exclude an inquiry into the "sources, forms, and results of the laws" * by which we are governed? And yet, whenever such investigations are entered upon, questions arise, which affect the principles on which the science of jurisprudence is founded, and afford an opportunity for discussion of the most useful and instructive character. Next to the Holy Book of God, the laws of a country have the most immediate influence in directing public opinion as to what is right and wrong, and become, in a corresponding degree, the dictator of the moral code by which the people are influenced.

The connection of law with the moral, social, and political conditions of the people, and the evidence which Statistical Inquiries afford as to the effect of law in respect to punishment, offence, and crime, show how impossible it is to separate an investigation of the sources and occasion of laws from the inquiries of Statistics; but the former, as a specialty, requires to be treated in a special manner; and hence the formation of a "Juridical Branch," on which the Society has determined, is not only the necessary and proper consequence of its former proceedings, but will also afford ample opportunity for a free and full consideration of most important topics.

* Rule I. of the London Juridical Society.

I might speak of the specialities of other subjects, but sufficient has been said to remind the members of this Society not only of the comprehensiveness of its application, but of the manifold sources of interest and instruction which it is capable of affording. In entering, therefore, upon a new session of the Society's operations, may we all feel a renewed zeal for its support; and in the consideration or discussion of subjects for our own instruction or the general advantage, may the search after knowledge, and the investigation of truth, heighten our esteem and respect for one another. May our minds be refreshed, as we withdraw from our ordinary avocations to occupy our thoughts with the sources of economic advantages; may we find in our experience that as the body, by judicious exercise, so the mind, by well-directed application, is healthfully improved; and, in short, may the result of our meetings and deliberations be in accordance with those holy sentiments of Christian love: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

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